Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A catheter assembly comprising:

a hollow sheath having a proximal portion, ~~and~~ a tip, and a hub at the proximal portion;

an elongate operative element slidably and rotatably housed within the sheath, the operative element comprising a distal end and a proximal end;

the elongate operative element comprising a relatively stiff initial section extending from the proximal end thereof, wherein the stiff initial section extends distally beyond the hub to permit the elongate operative element to move back and forth within the hollow sheath;

a rotatable combined connector secured to the proximal end of the operative element so as to be proximal to the hub, said combined connector comprising a data/information connector and a mechanical connector; and said combined connector comprising an angled rotary alignment surface that is adapted to blind mate with a corresponding connector of a drive unit that has an angled rotary alignment surface.

2. (Original) The catheter assembly according to claim 1 wherein said data/information connector comprises an electrical connector.

3. (Original) The catheter assembly according to claim 1 wherein said mechanical connector comprises a rotary drive connector.

4. (Previously presented) The catheter assembly according to claim 3 wherein said rotary drive connector comprises a drive surface which simultaneously extends axially and circumferentially.

5. (Original) The catheter assembly according to claim 1 wherein said combined connector comprises a rotary alignment surface.

6. (Previously presented) The catheter assembly according to claim 1 wherein said elongate operative element comprises an imaging cable having an image element at said distal end thereof.

7. (Original) The catheter assembly according to claim 1 wherein said initial section comprises a metal tube.

8. (Original) The catheter assembly according to claim 1 further comprising a fluid seal between said proximal portion of said sheath and the initial section of the elongate operative element.

9. (Previously presented) The catheter system according to claim 1 wherein said elongate operative element comprises a flexible imaging core and a relatively stiff tube at the proximal end thereof to create a relatively stiff initial section of the elongate operative element extending from the proximal end thereof.

10-32 (Canceled)

33. (Withdrawn) A method for preparing a catheter system for use, comprising the following steps:

selecting a catheter assembly, said catheter assembly comprising:

a hollow sheath having a proximal portion and a tip;

an elongate operative element slidably and rotatably housed within the sheath, the operative element comprising a distal end and a proximal end; and

a second combined connector secured to the proximal end of the operative element; and

mounting said catheter assembly to a drive assembly by:

positioning a rotatable and translatable first combined connector at an extended position; and

connecting the second combined connector of the catheter assembly to the first combined connector while securing the proximal portion of the sheath to a proximal portion

mount of the drive assembly so that rotating the first combined connector rotates the second combined connector which in turn rotates the elongate operative element within the sheath, and moving the first combined connector along a longitudinal path between said extended position and a retracted position translates the second combined connector which in turn translates the operative element within the sheath.

34. (New) A catheter assembly comprising:

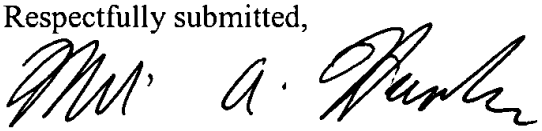
a hollow sheath having a proximal portion and a tip;

an elongate operative element slidably and rotatably housed within the sheath, the operative element comprising a distal end and a proximal end;

the elongate operative element comprising a relatively stiff initial section extending from the proximal end thereof, wherein the stiff initial section is stiffer than an adjacent distal portion of the elongate operative element;

a rotatable combined connector secured to the proximal end of the operative element, said combined connector comprising a data/information connector and a mechanical connector; and said combined connector comprising an angled rotary alignment surface that is adapted to blind mate with a corresponding connector of a drive unit that has an angled rotary alignment surface.

Respectfully submitted,



Melissa A. Haapala
Reg. No. 47,622

TOWNSEND and TOWNSEND and CREW LLP
Two Embarcadero Center, Eighth Floor
San Francisco, California 94111-3834
Tel: 303-571-4000
Fax: 415-576-0300
MAH:nlm
60168525 v1